

# **LUKE**

## Part 52: “True Repentance”

Luke 13:1-9

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Sunday, February 24, 2019 (Epiphany Season)

### **Scripture Reading**

**13** There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

<sup>6</sup> And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ <sup>8</sup> And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. <sup>9</sup> Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”<sup>1</sup>

*Almighty and Everlasting God, “in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forever more” (Ps. 16:11). May your Holy Spirit give us eyes to see your perfect goodness, so that we may daily be inspired to turn away from sin and turn towards you. We pray this in mighty name of Jesus, our Redeemer. AMEN.*

### **Introduction**

Here in the gospel of Luke, Jesus is making his final journey toward the city of Jerusalem. Along the way, several men approach him to share some breaking news.

Remember, in Jesus’s time, there is no 24/7 news cycle. Newspapers, television, and social media do not yet exist. But even then, big news stories were able to go viral, due to the power of word of mouth.

Several informants have come up to Jesus with such a story. Recently, several men from Galilee went to Jerusalem to attend a worship festival and were there brutally executed by the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate. In this way, Pilate “mingled” their blood with their sacrifices (Lk. 13:1).

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 13:1–9.

Now, one thing you need to know about the political situation in first century Palestine is that Galilee was a region known for political dissent and nationalist ambitions.<sup>2</sup> Some Israelites of the day were okay with the reality of Roman rule, but most people from Galilee wanted to be an independent state. So maybe these men from Galilee went to Jerusalem to try to stir up a riot and gain support for their political movement. Maybe they were legitimately there to worship but were arrested and executed for something they never did. All we know is that the Galileans who came to Jerusalem are now dead.

Now you might ask, “Why would people specifically seek out Jesus to tell him this news? Why would it matter to Jesus?” But think about this for a moment. Where is Jesus coming from? He is coming from the region of *Galilee*. Where is Jesus going? He is going toward *Jerusalem*, with a group of men who are mostly from Galilee who keep on talking about a new kingdom that is at hand.

The itinerant newscasters are subtly making a suggestion that would not be missed by Jesus and his disciples. They are saying, “Jesus, turn around. Go back. Stop walking down this road. At the end of this road lies death.”

Jesus responds by essentially saying, “Funny enough, I was just about to say the same thing to you. The reason I have come is to command people to turn around, to go back, to stop walking down a road that leads only to death.”

Another way of saying it would be that Jesus takes this opportunity to teach everyone around him about one of the most crucial and most misunderstood concepts in the Bible – the concept of **“True Repentance.”**

So for the rest of our time this morning, I want to break down what Jesus has to say about true repentance in four ways: we will talk about **1.) The Necessity of True Repentance, 2.) The Definition of True Repentance, 3.) The Urgency of True Repentance, and 4.) The Mercy of True Repentance.**

## **Exposition**

### **1.) The Necessity of True Repentance.**

There are two examples of then-recent suffering that appear in our text: the story of Pilate killing the Galileans and the story of the eighteen people in Jerusalem who died when a tower suddenly collapsed.

The first is an example of suffering that comes from human violence. The second is an example that Jesus brings up is a story about suffering that arises from a natural disaster or accidental causes. The modern day equivalents would be mass shootings and hurricanes.

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<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 553.

The question is: how should we interpret such events?

I don't know what you might make sense of such events, but I think we have a pretty good idea of how the Pharisees would have explained such happenings.

Pharisaic ideology simplistically claimed that bad things only happen to bad people.<sup>3</sup> This is not a biblical view on suffering, by the way. Such a mindset is more like karma than it is like Christianity. However, this worldview was popular and virtually universally assumed in Jesus's day that even the disciples were guilty of thinking this way from time to time. This is from the book of John: **"As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"** (John 9:1–2, ESV).

There is somewhat of a self-congratulatory mindset, isn't there? They are saying, *"Too bad for this guy who is suffering. But he probably deserved it. Aren't we glad we are such good people who deserve only good things?"*

Thus, in hearing this news, Jesus corrects this unbiblical view of suffering with theological truth. The real reason people suffer is that we live in a sin-fractured world, and the reality of sin in the world is something that we are all responsible for. All people are born with the unavoidable instinct of self-absorption and self-worship that the Bible calls *sin*.

And if this is true, what should we do? Jesus's answer is simple – *repent* (μετανοέω).<sup>4</sup> Look back at our text: **"And he answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish'"** (Luke 13:2–5, ESV).

Jesus is saying, repentance is for everyone – not just the people we think are especially sinful. We have a very dangerous tendency of looking at the others' sin as a means of minimizing our sin. But the truth is we all sin. We all fall short of the glory of God (cf. Rom. 3:23). We are only different insofar as to the degree by which we fall short.<sup>5</sup> We will all stand before the judgment of God.

For this reason, the theme of repentance is emphasized all throughout Luke's gospel.<sup>6</sup> In Luke 5, Jesus says, **"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"**

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 553.

<sup>4</sup> "to change one's mind, feel remorse, repent, be converted" William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 640.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: That You May Know the Truth](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 81–82.

<sup>6</sup> Fred B. Craddock, [Luke](#), Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 167.

(Luke 5:32, ESV). In Luke 24, Jesus says, “...*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem*” (Luke 24:46–47, ESV).

Jesus is showing us over and over again; repentance is an essential part of the Christian gospel. And I would go so far to say that a gospel without the call to repentance is not the Christian gospel.

## **2.) The Definition of True Repentance.**

So here is the problem with everything I have said up until now. I think repentance is one of the most misunderstood words in Christian vocabulary. So before we go further, I think it is important to describe what repentance is not.

Repentance is not self-hatred, self-condemnation, self-punishment, or an attempt to self-atone for sin. Repentance is not merely feeling regretful for something you did wrong and saying sorry. Repentance is not verbally affirming that you believe in Christian doctrine as opposed to other worldviews. Repentance is not that one time when you walked down an aisle and prayed a prayer. Repentance is not church attendance, church membership, or even holding a position in church leadership.

*True repentance is turning away from sin and turning toward a God who is better than sin.*

True repentance is turning away from our chronic worry and toward a God who is in control. It is turning away from lust and addiction and toward a God in whom is fullness of joy. It is turning away from pride and vanity and toward a God who is glorious and is the only one who approval matters.

Repentance is a necessary part of being a Christian. It is allowing the truth of the gospel to be displayed with your life. True repentance cannot be faked, because true repentance bears fruit. It is a necessarily practical and applied reality of the Christian life.

And that is the point of the parable Jesus tells, “*And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down’ ”*” (Luke 13:6–9, ESV).

In the parable, the fig tree is not immature. It is a fully-grown tree that should be bearing fruit, even though it is not. Likewise, when we say we believe the gospel, our lives should bear the fruit of repentance, or else we should expect judgment.

What is the fruit of repentance, you may ask? The fruit of repentance is the fruit of the Spirit: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”* (Galatians 5:22–24, ESV).

In this way, the fruit of the Spirit is not something we create. But it is something that we partner with God to create in us by crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires.

So let’s think about repentance practically. What should repentance look like for us?

*Repentance looks like determining and discarding thoughts, habits, and practices that distract us and detract us from the love of God, as well as intentionally embracing that which fuels and focuses our affections upon Jesus.*

This understanding of repentance gives us a whole new outlook on things like reading the Bible, prayer, going to church, enjoying Christian fellowship, and singing songs of worship. It is possible to do these things as a way of ticking off a spiritual checklist. But the real reason we should do these things is that they are means of grace that stir us to an awareness of God in our lives.

That’s why I think one of the most significant moments in our times of Sunday worship is the moment of confession before we take the Lord’s Supper. It is moment where we can purposefully focus our hearts to turn away from sin and turn toward a God who is better than our sin.

Sometimes we need to set aside seasons of time to focus on repentance specifically. That’s why our church, along with many Christians across history, have observed the season of Lent, which is a season of focused prayer and fasting, leading up to Easter, that will begin in less than two weeks. If you have never observed Lent, maybe this year is a year that you can take part in Lent. But don’t look at Lent as a religious ritual or legalistic requirement. Look at Lent as one way you might determine and discard thoughts, habits, and practices that distract and detract you from a vibrant love of God.

The big idea here is that repentance is not just a one-time occurrence that we do when we become a Christian. We are to turn away from sin and unto God on a daily basis. As the great Protestant Reformer Martin Luther said in the first of his Ninety-five Theses: *“When the Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent,” he willed that the whole life of believers should be one of repentance.”*<sup>7</sup>

### **3.) The Urgency of True Repentance.**

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences: October 31, 1517*, electronic ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1996).

Jesus's parable ends without resolution. Did the tree bear fruit or not? Was it saved or destroyed? We do not know the outcome. And that tension of irresolution is meant to drive us to repentance with *urgency*.

God is merciful. And because God is merciful, he is long-suffering toward our sin. But make no mistake – he is not indifferent to our sin.

This is our one and only life. We are not guaranteed a single day of our future. We are mortal. Unless the Lord returns soon, we will die.

Repentance is not something that you can afford to put off. If you need to repent, attending to this need is the most urgent business you have.<sup>8</sup> Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart (Ps. 95:7-8). Especially today, if you have never become a Christian, turn away from sin, and turn toward the God who is better than sin!

Now, it would be easy to stop right here and say that we have done our job with this passage. But there is one more point in this parable that we shouldn't miss.

#### **4.) The Mercy of True Repentance.**

Thought the tree deserves death and judgment, the tree is saved for a period of time, based on an unexpected turn of events – the intercession of the vinedresser. The vinedresser commits to something in the tree it could never do for itself. The vinedresser commits to literally getting his hands dirty for the sake of the tree. He digs in the dirt, waters the plant, and applies fertilizer so that the plant might live.

The redemptive work of the vinedresser is what makes fruit bearing repentance possible for a tree that is broken. We are broken too. The only way we could bear fruit is rooted in the merciful accomplishment of Jesus on the cross and his ongoing care for our lives.

I love how Kent Hughes explains this, *"Oh, the astonishing mercy and grace of God! He digs to free us, pounds on us through life's ups and downs, pries at our earthly attachments, so we might become fruitful. Has Jesus been digging around the roots of your earthbound soul with inexplicable providences in your relationships or your profession or your family that have left you reeling? The object of these shakings is that you might become fruitful. Astonishing mercy!"*<sup>9</sup>

Repentance is not a drudging duty. It is a response to the mercy of God.

For this reason, I love how *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* defines repentance, *"Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin,*

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<sup>8</sup> Craddock, 167.

<sup>9</sup> Hughes, 84.

*and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.*<sup>10</sup>

Now that is a lot of old language in the 1600s, but listen to how illuminating this is concerning the motive and outcome of repentance.<sup>11</sup>

The motive for repentance is always two-fold. There is a genuine grieving over sin, knowing that our sin is against a great and glorious God. But even more, there is a sense of the mercy of God. There is a true understanding that sin gives us no joy, but only pain and death, as well as an understanding that our God is a good father. When we turn back to him, he embraces us. That is why we can have the courage to repent day after day, again and again.

Secondly, the outcome of repentance is more than getting back to things as they were before we sinned. Repentance opens the door to a newness of life; a life that is not possible without the death of Jesus on the cross.

This makes this story in Luke all the more amazing. Men have come to tell Jesus that death and danger await men like him in Jerusalem. But Jesus already knows why lies in front of him. For this is the reason, Jesus has come into the world. He goes to Jerusalem to be the vinedresser for broken trees. He goes toward death and sin so that we could turn towards life and righteousness.

So Redeemer Christian Church, “...let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1–2, ESV).

AMEN.

### **Community Group Discussion Starters**

1. Summarize Luke 13:1-9 in your own words.
2. What does the word “repentance” mean to you?
3. The Westminster Short Catechism defines repentance in the following way: “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.” How is this definition clarifying and challenging?
4. What should gospel-motivated repentance look like in your life?

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<sup>10</sup> Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), 419.

<sup>11</sup> The following derives much from Ray Ortlund. “What is True Repentance?” *The Gospel Coalition*. December 5, 2012. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/ray-ortlund/what-is-true-repentance/>

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